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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001911

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SUBJECT: "TOO SOPHISTICATED FOR JORDAN:" PUBLISHER PULLS
PLUG ON YOUTH MAGAZINE

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Pulp Magazine, a youth-oriented English-language monthly magazine known for tackling controversial subjects including sexuality, drug use, and abortion, was discontinued after 13 months of publication because the publisher found the magazine "too sophisticated for Jordan." Pulp Magazine staff told us they were given an ultimatum after their last issue in May by the publisher, Front Row Publishing, to "tone down" the magazine or discontinue publication due to complaints by some readers about the subject matter of the magazine's articles. The magazine's staff refused to alter their coverage or tone, and the magazine was subsequently closed down. Pulp Magazine's staff now plan to take their message to the internet, where they said they expect a greater degree of freedom over what they can write. END SUMMARY.

"WE WON'T COMPROMISE OUR PRINCIPLES"

12. (C) Pulp Magazine Editor-in-Chief Mosaab Mustafa and Features Editor Lena Ghannam told PDoff that the magazine's publisher, Front Row Publishing, discontinued publishing the magazine in June after telling Pulp staff that their publication "was too edgy for Jordan." Mustafa said the youth-oriented magazine's staff "always had a different idea than (that of) the publishers for the magazine." Following the release of the magazine's 13th issue, Mustafa said Front Row's Managing Director, Iyad Shehadeh, told the magazine's staff that Pulp would have to "tone down" its subject matter or shut down due to "complaints from the public and advertisers." After Pulp's staff refused to significantly alter its content, Front Row discontinued the magazine. Pulp's staff does not allege that there was any official censorship from the GOJ and assert advertisers had no complaints. "They wanted us to be more fluffy, and we refused. We won't compromise our principles," Mustafa said. Shehadeh confirmed his concerns about the magazine's content, telling us on June 24 that "Pulp Magazine was a bit too sophisticated for Jordan. The people did not relate to it."

13. (U) Pulp Magazine was one of a series of glossy, mostly English-language monthly magazines created by Front Row Publishing catering to Jordan's wealthier, educated, and English-speaking readers. Front Row's other magazines include publications like Jordan Business Magazine that cater to businesspeople, but most of its publications are lifestyle magazines targeting Jordanian women with titles like Living Well, Living Well Weddings, Home, and Intee (the feminine form of "You"). In a February meeting with PDoff, Shehadeh said that Pulp Magazine was Front Row's attempt to target "young Jordanian men and women" and he praised Pulp's staff as "young and energetic people with a lot of new ideas."

14. (C) Mustafa, a 27-year-old graduate of McGill University, and Ghannam, a 25-year-old New York University alumna, told us that Pulp's staff targeted an upscale and "progressive" readership -- largely educated abroad, fluent in English and having "more progressive social opinions than most

Jordanians." "Our readers were definitely the West Amman set," Ghannam said, referring to the capital's wealthier neighborhood. The magazine's advertisers largely consisted of expensive clothing and furniture stores, trendy Amman clubs, and international retailers like Virgin Music and Swatch. "We knew that all Jordanians wouldn't relate to the magazine, but we also thought that there were a lot more people out there than you might expect that do relate to it," she said. According to Front Row, the magazine distributed close to 5,000 copies each month, focusing on venues like clubs, hotels, gyms, hair salons, and universities, and largely depended on advertising revenue.

TACKLING CONTROVERSY: SEX, DRUGS, AND HOMOSEXUALITY

15. (U) After publishing its first issue in April, 2007, Pulp quickly developed a reputation for tackling controversial subjects. Pulp staff said that one of the issues that generated the most controversy was a November, 2007 issue that included a feature entitled "Sex in Amman" that asked young Jordanians "how sex is changing in Jordan." Young people offered their opinions on the sexual practices of Jordanian youth with one 18-year-old male commenting, "Sex is more common with teenagers now." A 24-year-old said, "There was open-mindedness here a long time ago and then the Islamic Movement in the 1980s prohibited it. Now we're like the West." The article also featured the results of a poll on sexual behaviors, generated from its Facebook internet site which queried young Jordanians registered on the site. According to the questionnaire, 44% of respondents knew someone who has had an abortion and 73% supported making

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abortion legal in Jordan.

16. (U) The magazine also ran pictures of parties in Amman clubs of young Jordanians who were clearly intoxicated. Pulp frequently addressed other controversial subjects like drug use and homosexuality, while featuring articles criticizing Jordanian society for not taking enough action against sexism and "honor killings" which concluded that "Jordan tops a short list of countries that see the act of 'honor' killings as a necessary part of maintaining culture, tradition, and social values- not to mention family pride." A February, 2008 article entitled "Fear of the Queer: What's Religion Got to Do With It?" discussed whether "a more gay-friendly interpretation of Islam" is necessary.

17. (C) Pulp's staff defended the magazine from complaints that it was "too progressive and controversial for Jordan." "I had aunts (referring to mothers of friends) coming up to me in stores asking me why we were writing about such controversial subjects. There were definitely some people who were scandalized," Ghannam said. Mustafa stressed that while the magazine addressed controversial subjects, it did so "in a respectful fashion. We just wanted to discuss these subjects in a balanced way." Ghannam added that the magazine's articles on sex "focused on education and encouraging young people to avoid diseases. We were pushing things, but we were not being disrespectful." In its anniversary issue in April, Mustafa acknowledged criticism of the magazine stating that the staff was aware of concerns about its content. "Believe me, we have toned it down," he said at the time. Ghannam explained that she was "less diplomatic" in the anniversary issue, questioning why Jordanian society was "so resistant to change" in her monthly column. Despite the staff's statements in their anniversary issue that they would respond to criticism by toning down the magazine's content, Pulp published only one more issue before Front Row discontinued it.

18. (C) Among Amman's young professionals, word of Pulp's demise has spread and several readers acknowledged the magazine was too controversial for some. "People definitely read this magazine and they know it's no longer around. There

were lots of rumors that people were complaining about it. They were just too edgy for Jordan," Abboud Kayali, a 27-year-old journalist, said. Tala Faris, a 23-year-old investment banker, said she had heard "Pulp got into trouble with the subjects they addressed. Everyone knows why they were shut down." Shehadeh told PDoff that Front Row is working on a new publication entitled "Living Well Teen" that will be released in September. Dana Bdeir, who will serve as editor-in-chief of the new publication, told PDoff the new magazine will avoid the controversies that Pulp generated. "They got into trouble for their stories. The magazine and Front Row was getting a lot of pressure," she added.

TAKING IT TO THE INTERNET

19. (C) Mustafa and Ghannam said they are still upset about Front Row's decision to discontinue Pulp. "Our publishers are so old, and they are so Jordanian in their ways," Ghannam complained. They stressed, however, that they do not want to "create more waves" by criticizing the publishers in public. They disagreed that the magazine was discontinued due to concerns over advertising revenue. "I didn't hear complaints from advertisers, and we had plenty of ads. This was all about the aunties complaining," Ghannam concluded. Mustafa said the magazine's staff plans to regroup later this summer, and create a new internet site that will cater to Jordanian young people. "We think we'll have more freedom to write what we want on the internet," he explained. "Not even the King's office controls the internet, especially if you don't have a ".jo" address," Ghannam added. "This website will be awesome. It will be the kind of site that every West Amman type wakes up and checks before starting their day."

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